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Todd Heisler's image of a flag-draped body arriving for burial at the Reno airport while multiple business-class passengers watch through their seat windows first appeared in the *Rocky Mountain News* in 2005 as part of a series on Colorado Marines returning home from Iraq in caskets. The series won him the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography.

Focus in the image is created through the high contrast of light radiating out from the cargo hold to silhouette the formal dress Marines bending over a red-and-white striped shape. In a different context, these stripes would not be read so clearly as a flag, but combined with the soldiers' uniforms and posture, the narrative of the image is instantly conveyed. Their formal dress and serious attention to the coffin makes this portion of the scene feel serious and solemn; rather than requiring a single soldier, a matter of this weight (literal and figurative) requires three of them.

White and red stripes are also repeated within the image; those of the flag are echoed in the red stripes on the soldiers' pants and white belts, all which align the eye toward the casket itself. The long red and white stripe, part of the logo of the airline company, serves to divide the heavier, lower two-thirds of the image (dominated by darkness and the weight of death indicated by the coffin) from the lighter top one-third (dominated by the faces of regular passengers aboard the airline). Seemingly accidentally, the vertical black bar (probably part of the cargo door assembly) interrupts this line and seems to bridge the two halves.



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The bright rectangle with rounded corners of the open cargo hold is repeated multiple times within the image with the straight line of eight airplane windows, indicating a secondary focus of the image. Each window silhouettes its own miniature portrait of more traditional passengers looking down on the scene below. That the gaze of those passengers is cast down at the flag-draped coffin only magnifies its focus in the image, though each window displays a slightly different attitude toward the scene. It is as though each face represents one individual citizen grappling with how to understand the realities of the war in Iraq. These figures are seemingly dressed in 'street clothes' instead of military uniforms, highlighting the contrast between those that serve and those that do not. Their gaze also seems directed outwardly at the viewer of the image, especially the woman in the fifth window; in their position of being above (and therefore relatively powerful in the image) they seem both to critique the scene of the body's arrival for burial as well as the viewer's personal response to such a scene. Most likely the photo's audience identifies with the repeated faces in the windows rather than the servicemen attending to the coffin or the dead soldier.

The caption confirms this narrative, referring to Major Steve Beck's assessment of the significance of the scene in the minds of the passengers. "You gotta wonder what's going through their minds," he comments; his informal speech contrasts with the formality of the dress uniforms, but his comments emphasize the relationship between those preparing the coffin and the more traditional passengers. In fact the whole image has a voyeuristic feeling to it – the orderly process of the military being observed from outside.

"They're going to remember being on that plane for the rest of their lives," Major Beck comments. The purpose of the image is for the viewer of the photograph to do the same, and to think again about the sacrifice made by those in military service, even as they go about their ordinary lives.